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#33
131

PETER PARKER SPIDER-MAN®

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FAUCHER

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delgado

WHEN I WAS A KID, TIME WAS A SNAIL.

NOW, IT'S A *GREYHOUND.*

BUCKY + WAYNE 4

EVERY YEAR, THIS DAY COMES AROUND...REGULARLY LIKE CLOCKWORK AND MORE *QUICKLY* THAN THE YEAR BEFORE.

I ALWAYS KNOW IT'S COMING, BUT IT NEVER FAILS TO TAKE ME BY SURPRISE.

THIS IS THE DAY MY UNCLE BEN DIED.

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I REMEMBER MORE WEIRD LITTLE MINUTIAE THAN ANYTHING ELSE. AUNT MAY WAS MAKING PEACH COBBLER THAT NIGHT. I WAS SHUFFLING HOME WITH MY HANDS IN MY POCKETS, THINKING ABOUT SUPERMODELS.

AS I TURNED THE CORNER TO OUR HOUSE, I SAW FLASHING LIGHTS AND A COUPLE OF NEIGHBORS OUT IN THE STREET. FOR A MOMENT, I THOUGHT MAYBE A GAS MAIN HAD BROKEN. BUT IT WAS SOMETHING MUCH, MUCH ***WORSE.***

UNCLE BEN LAY AT THE FOOT OF THE STAIRS, HIS FACE ASHEN WHITE AND STIFF, HIS BLOOD POOLING OUT LIKE A BIG RED STARFISH, THE POLICE WERE ASKING AUNT MAY QUESTIONS NEXT DOOR.

I REMEMBER ONE OF THE DETECTIVES LATER ASKED ME IF I'D SEEN ANYONE SUSPICIOUS, AND I JUST ***LOST*** IT. WHAT WAS I GOING TO SAY? *"YES, DETECTIVE. I HAVE THE POWERS OF A LARGE SPIDER, AND YOU KNOW THE GUY WHO MURDERED THE ONLY FATHER I EVER KNEW? I LET HIM ESCAPE JUST LAST WEEK."*

BEN PARKER

HE WAS LOVED

HE DIES ON THIS DAY EACH AND EVERY YEAR, ALL BECAUSE OF ***ME.*** EVERY YEAR, I WATCH AUNT MAY CRY FOR HIM AND KNOW IN MY HEART THAT IT WAS MY FAULT.

UNCLE BEN ALWAYS USED TO SAY HOW WITH GREAT POWER CAME GREAT RESPONSIBILITY--I GUESS I TOOK HIM PRETTY ***LITERALLY*** ON THAT ONE. I FOUND MYSELF FIGHTING BAD GUYS WHO ALWAYS SEEMED TO BE IN NEED OF A HAIRCUT OR A NEW WARDROBE. BUT I NEVER LOST SIGHT OF WHY I WAS DOING IT IN THE FIRST PLACE.

THE YEARS MAY COME AND GO. TIME MAY HEAL ALL WOUNDS.

BUT NOT *THIS* ONE.

BEN PARKER
HE WAS LOVED
Ben, I miss you. Peter X
BEN PARKER
HE WAS LOVED
HELLO, MY DARLING.
BEN PARKER
HE WAS LOVED

I NEVER *GO* WITH HER... NOT BECAUSE OF *GUILT*, BUT BECAUSE I FIGURE SHE NEEDS TO BE ALONE WITH HIM ONCE IN A WHILE. SHE MISSES HIM AS MUCH NOW AS SHE *EVER* DID.

SOMETIMES, I GET THE IMPRESSION SHE'S JUST BIDING HER TIME, SEEING ME THROUGH A FEW MORE YEARS BEFORE SHE GOES OFF TO VISIT WITH THE GOOD OLD BOY FOR GOOD.

IT'S BEEN HARD TO MAKE PEACE WITH MYSELF, KNOWING WHAT I KNOW. I GUESS YOU COULD SAY MY REDEMPTION IS A WORK IN PROGRESS.

I'M STILL *TRYING*, THOUGH. WHEN THE ANNIVERSARY ROLLS AROUND, I HAVE MY OWN PARTICULAR WAY OF DEALING WITH IT.

KEY

I GO WITH A FINE OLD PARKER FAMILY *TRADITION*.

YOU *READY*, BOSS?

I COULD FOLLOW THIS ROUTE IN MY *SLEEP*, IF I WANTED TO. HOP ON THE G AT NORTHERN BOULEVARD, CHANGE AT JACKSON HEIGHTS AND WALK ACROSS TO 74TH. THEN ONTO THE 7 AND OUT TO SHEA STADIUM.

MOST OF THE JOURNEY OUT, I LIKE TO CLOSE MY EYES AND TAKE IT ALL IN, LISTENING TO THE EXPECTANT HUM OF THE FANS AND THE INTELLECTUAL DISCOURSE OF MY FELLOW BASEBALL *COGNOSCENTE*.

WITH OUR LOT, THAT USUALLY MEANS A COUPLE OF LOUDMOUTHS AT THE BACK COMPLAINING ABOUT HOW POORLY WE'RE DOING THIS YEAR AND HOW THE GUY PLAYING ANY GIVEN POSITION IS AN OVERPAID BUM.

QUEENS

I GUESS I COULD ALWAYS *IDENTIFY* WITH THE METS, YOU KNOW? A BUNCH OF LOVABLE LOSERS WHO HIT THE OCCASIONAL HOME RUN BY ACCIDENT. JUST LIKE ME.

AS WE RATTLE AND HUM ON OUR WAY TO THE GAME, THE AIR'S A MIXTURE OF SWEAT, TOBACCO RESIDUE AND *HOPE*. EVERYONE'S AS DESPERATE AS ME FOR A HOT DOG AND A *WIN*.

BUGLE SPORTS

BY THE TIME WE GET TO WILLETS POINT, THE CROWD IS A SEA OF BLUE. THIS IS MY TEAM, MY EXTENDED FAMILY OF MISFITS.

ME AND AMERICAN TRADITION: WHAT A *PAIR*.

Mets

IT'S A SHORT WALK TO SHEA FROM HERE. YOU CAN IMAGINE RED SOX OR CUB FANS MAKING THE SAME TRIP TODAY, DOOMED AND EXPECTANT AT THE SAME TIME.

THAT TIME IN '86 WHEN BILLY BUCK LET THAT GROUND BALL THROUGH HIS LEGS, YOU DIDN'T KNOW WHETHER TO LAUGH OR ***CRY.*** I FIGURE THERE'S SOME OLD DUDE IN BOSTON STILL GAPING SLACK-JAWED AT THE TV SCREEN, MUTTERING ABOUT THE *"CURSE OF THE BAMBINO"* AND WONDERING IF BUCKNER'LL FIELD IT CLEANLY ON THE REPLAY.

THAT WORLD SERIES WAS JUST A BLIP ON THE RADAR SCREEN OF FATE FOR US, I GUESS. AFTER THAT, WE REJOINED THE RANK AND FILE, WHILE THE OTHER GUYS CONTINUED TO RACK UP DIAMOND RINGS AND MEDIA ATTENTION AT THE RICH END OF TOWN.

SHEA STADIUM

BUT TO ME, IT'S NEVER BEEN ABOUT WINNING. BASEBALL'S FAR BIGGER THAN JUST A GOOD RESULT.

MIND YOU, BEING A METS FAN, I *WOULD* SAY THAT.

WHAT D'YOU SAY, UNCLE BEN? MAYBE *THIS* YEAR?

TURNSTILE.

TICKET OFFICE

TURNSTILE AGAIN.

TICKET OFFICE

C'MON PETEY... WE'RE IN THE FAN CLUB SEATS JUST BEHIND THE DUGOUT.

MEGA!

THE FIRST TIME HE BROUGHT ME HERE, I HAD NO IDEA WHAT TO EXPECT. HECK, THE FACT THAT WE'D JUST RIDDEN THE SUBWAY WAS MORE THAN *I* COULD'VE EXPECTED OUT OF MY AFTERNOON.

UNCLE BEN HAD GOTTEN OUR TICKETS FROM MISTER WATSON DOWN AT THE CORNER STORE. HE FIGURED IT WAS HIGH TIME I LEARNED THE FINER POINTS OF BASEBALL.

ME, I COULD HAVE CARED LESS ABOUT BATTING AVERAGES. I WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT THE REALLY *COOL* STUFF --

WHATTA THEM BIG NUMBERS FOR, UNCA BEN?

THOSE ARE RETIRED JERSEYS--

WHASSA BIG APPLE FOR?

FOR WHEN WE HIT A HOME RUN--

C'N WE BUY WUNNA THEM BIG, POINTY FINGUZ?

SURE WE CAN.

THERE ARE SOME PRETTY GOOD SEATS, *HUH*, KILLER? YOU EXCITED?

POP CORN

UH-HUH. YEAH!

AND NOW, TO HONOR AMERICA, POLYSTAR RECORDING ARTIST, MISS SAGE ALLISON!

OHHH, SAY CAN YOU SEEE...

ALL OF *THREE* SECONDS...THAT'S HOW LONG IT TOOK ME TO FALL UNDER BASEBALL'S SPELL.

IMMEDIATELY, I WAS ***CAPTIVATED***. FROM MY SECRET PERCH ABOVE AND LEFT OF HOME PLATE, I WATCHED IN EARNEST AS THE MOST PROFOUND DRAMA IN ALL OF HUMAN HISTORY UNFOLDED BEFORE ME.

I'D NEVER SEEN ANYONE THROW A FASTBALL BEFORE. IT WAS LIKE WATCHING A GUY TRY TO FEND OFF A BULLET WITH A PLASTIC STRAW.

SAFE!

WHOOOSH

NEXT THING YOU KNOW, THE CROWD AROUND ME HAD DISSOLVED INTO AN AMORPHOUS BLOB OF BLUE. I WAS DOWN THERE ON THE FIELD WITH MY NEWFOUND HEROES...

...THE OTHER TEAM'S MANAGER WAS SCREAMING AT AN OFFICIAL OVER A BAD CALL...

...THE BATTER HAD TWO STRIKES. THE PITCHER WAS BEGINNING HIS WIND-UP...

...AND ME, I WAS THE LITTLE BOY IN ROW 2, SEAT 12 WHO'D JUST FALLEN IN LOVE WITH THE NEW YORK METS.

I'LL NEVER FORGET THAT FIRST GAME:

I CLOSED MY EYES AND WENT FOR EVERY POP FLY THAT CAME NEAR US...

...EVEN THE ONES THAT LANDED TWENTY ROWS BACK.

NOW REMEMBER: WE CAN'T SIP OUR SODA UNTIL THE CATCHER THROWS TO SECOND BASE OR WE LOSE THE GAME. YOU GOT YOUR RALLY CAP ON, KILLER?

YUP.

I ABSORBED IT ALL--THE RALLY CAPS, THE FOUL BALLS, THE STRATEGY... EVEN THOUGH I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND ANY OF IT.

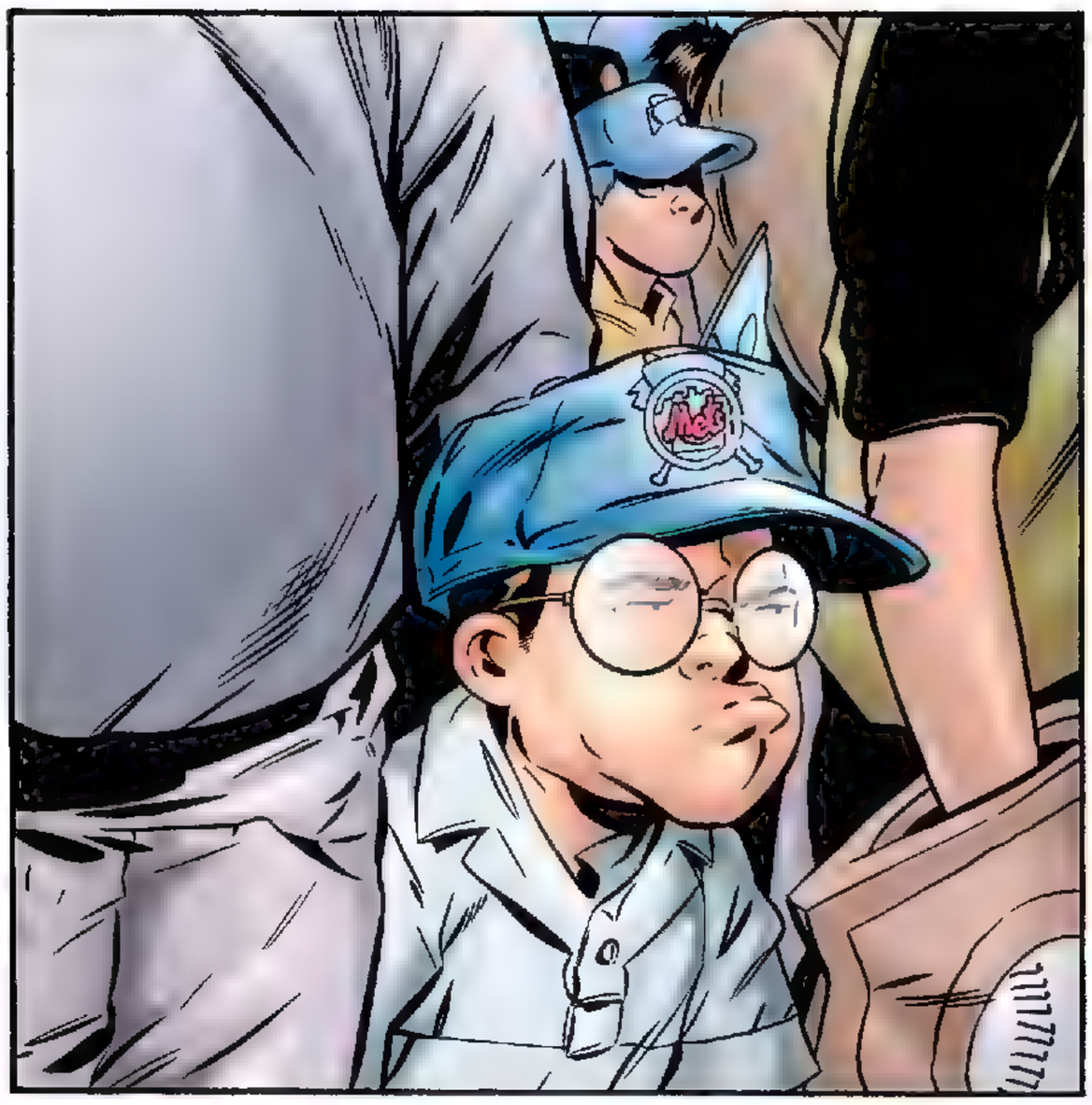
I THOUGHT THE SEVENTH INNING STRETCH WAS WHERE EVERYONE TOOK A NAP FOR A HALF HOUR AND RESUMED PLAY LATER ON.

BY THE NINTH INNING, THE GAME WAS WELL IN HAND. MY HEROES WERE AHEAD BY THREE RUNS. THE PITCHING COACH WAS SENT OUT TO BRING IN OUR CLOSER, JUST SO THE GUY COULD GET SOME WORK IN.

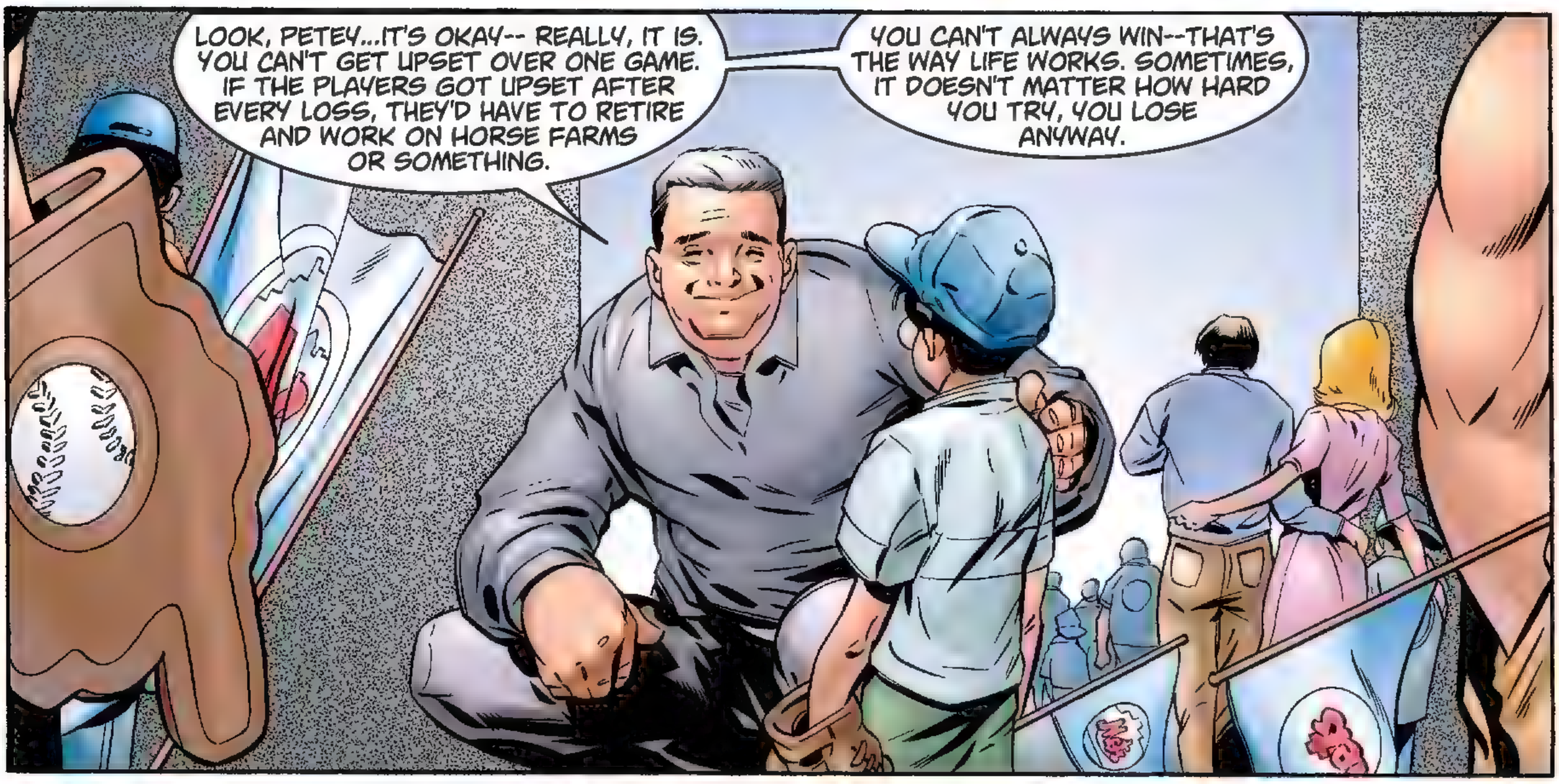
AND MOMENTS LATER, IT HAPPENED: LONGEST HOME RUN IN THE HISTORY OF SHEA STADIUM.

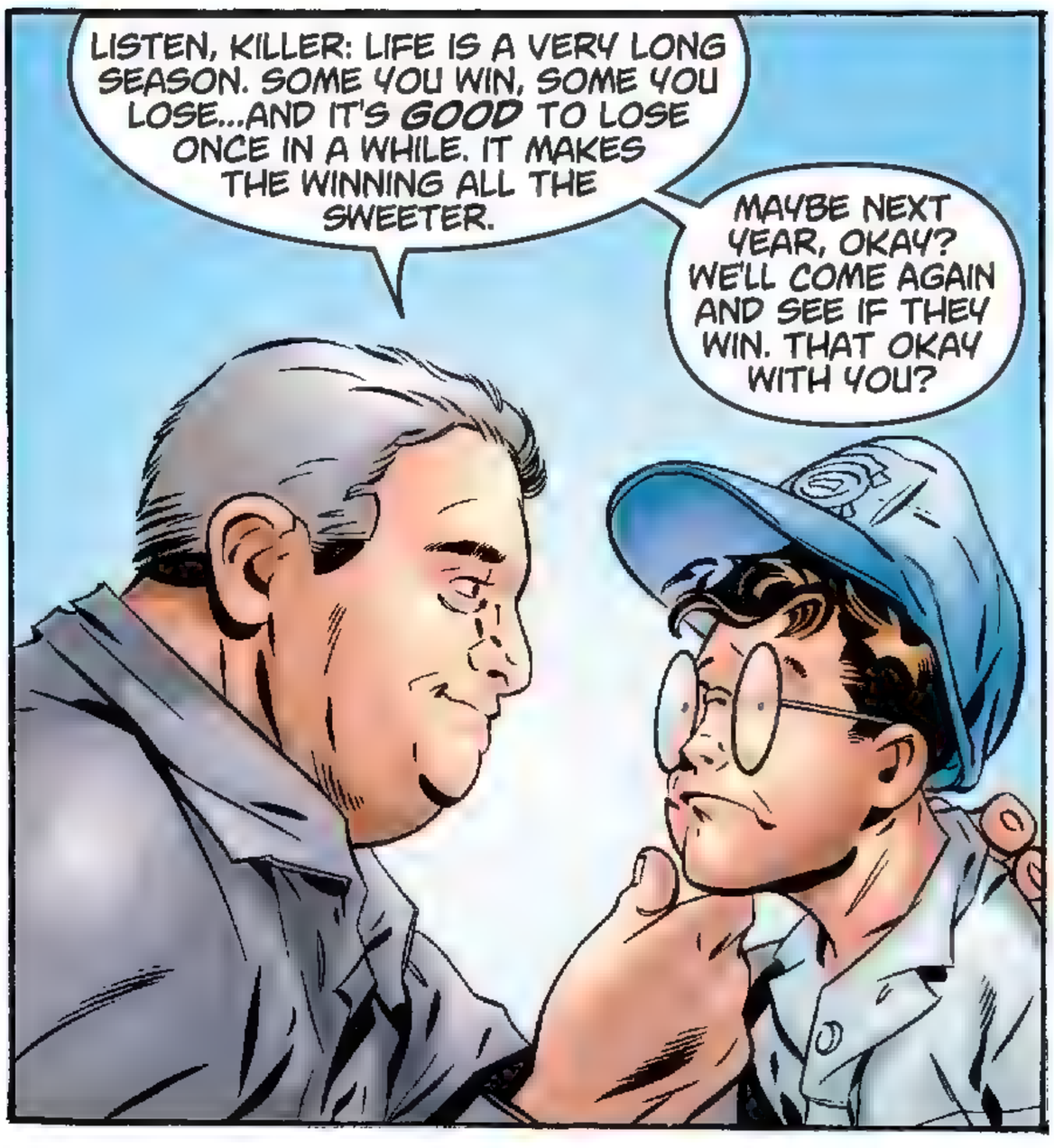
GRAND SLAM. FOUR RUNS.

METS *LOSE.*



WHAT'S WRONG, KILLER? YOU DIDN'T LIKE THE GAME?
I'M NOT COMIN' HERE AGAIN. THIS BLOWS.


LOOK, PETEY...IT'S OKAY-- REALLY, IT IS. YOU CAN'T GET UPSET OVER ONE GAME. IF THE PLAYERS GOT UPSET AFTER EVERY LOSS, THEY'D HAVE TO RETIRE AND WORK ON HORSE FARMS OR SOMETHING.
YOU CAN'T ALWAYS WIN--THAT'S THE WAY LIFE WORKS. SOMETIMES, IT DOESN'T MATTER HOW HARD YOU TRY, YOU LOSE ANYWAY.


LISTEN, KILLER: LIFE IS A VERY LONG SEASON. SOME YOU WIN, SOME YOU LOSE...AND IT'S GOOD TO LOSE ONCE IN A WHILE. IT MAKES THE WINNING ALL THE SWEETER.
MAYBE NEXT YEAR, OKAY? WE'LL COME AGAIN AND SEE IF THEY WIN. THAT OKAY WITH YOU?

OKAY.

OVER TIME, THAT CAME TO BE KNOWN AS "THE SPEECH," ON ACCOUNT OF HOW THE METS WOULD LOSE IN DIABOLICAL FASHION EVERY TIME WE ATTENDED OUR YEARLY GAME.

"MAYBE NEXT YEAR" BECAME OUR MANTRA.

Mets

SOMETIMES, IT'D BE A NINE-RUN BLOWOUT IN THE FIRST INNING. OTHER TIMES, THE CLOSER WOULD BE STRUCK WITH A CASE OF SPONTANEOUS CRAP-ITIS JUST AS THEIR PINCH HITTER STEPPED TO THE PLATE.

OUR ONGOING ATTENDANCE BECAME AFFECTIONATELY KNOWN BETWEEN THE TWO OF US AS THE "ANNUAL KISS OF DEATH TOUR."

BY ABOUT OUR SIXTH OR SEVENTH YEAR OF COMING, I WAS CERTAIN THINGS COULDN'T GET ANY WORSE. THAT WAS BEFORE THE ***MASCOT*** INCIDENT--

Mets

OH, JEEZ...

THIS PARTICULAR YEAR, THE METS HAD GIVEN UP TWELVE RUNS IN THE FIRST INNING, THERE'D BEEN AT LEAST THREE MALE STREAKERS, AND THE MANAGER HAD ALREADY BEEN EJECTED FOR CARRYING A CONCEALED WEAPON...

DON'T WORRY, SON-- I THINK WE GOT 'EM ON THE ROPES THIS TIME. WE'RE ONLY DOWN BY TWENTY-FOUR RUNS. THERE'S ALMOST TWO INNINGS LEFT--

O-OKAY, UNCLE BEN.

KRAK

THAT WAS WHEN I SAW IT HEADED FOR ME, LIKE A GIANT ASTEROID ON A COLLISION COURSE WITH SCHOOLBOY DESTINY.

THIS WAS THE MOMENT I'D BEEN WAITING FOR--THE VERY REASON I'D BROUGHT MY GLOVE ALONG WITH ME ALL THESE YEARS. FINALLY, MY VERY OWN SOUVENIR!

BONK

I CLOSED MY EYES AND WAITED FOR MY PRIZE TO HIT THE BACK OF MY GLOVE.

OH, DEAR.

MEDIC! HEY, WE NEED A MEDIC OVER HERE--THIS KID JUST GOT BEANED!

MEDIC

HEY, BOSS, YOU SEE THAT? SOME KID JUST GOT WHACKED ON THE HEAD.

NO PROBLEMO. I'M ON IT.

UHM...LISTEN, PERCY...CAN YOU GO OVER AND CHECK IT OUT, MAYBE DO SOME DAMAGE CONTROL?

BOSS SAYS WE GOTTA MAKE SURE THE CUSTOMERS DON'T GET SCARED WHEN THIS HAPPENS.

PR

Mets

MASCOT MR

AUGHH...

MEDIC

DON'T MOVE, SON. JUST LIE REAL STILL.

KID HOW'RE YOU...

...KID! HEY, KID, CAN YOU HEAR ME?

THERE YA GO. DON'T WORRY, LITTLE BUDDY-- EVERYTHING'S OKAY NOW. YOU'RE GOING TO BE JUST *FINE*.

OHMIGOD!

AAH!

AAHHHHH!

WELL, AT LEAST I MADE THE PAPERS THE NEXT DAY--MY BEANING WAS THE HIGHLIGHT OF THE GAME, APPARENTLY.

IN OTHER NEWS, THE METS LOST BY THIRTY RUNS, OUR FIRST BASEMAN BLEW HIS ARM OUT PITCHING RELIEF, AND THE *OWNER* WAS EJECTED FOR CHARGING THE MOUND.

THANKFULLY, I REMEMBERED NONE OF IT. AND, AS AN ADDED BONUS, I DIDN'T HAVE TO LISTEN TO "THE SPEECH."

NOT THAT I DON'T REMEMBER IT EVEN TO THIS DAY, WORD FOR WORD. IT'S STAYED WITH ME ALL THIS TIME.

I STILL SWING BY HERE SOMETIMES WHEN THINGS ARE QUIET IN THE CITY. JUST TO CATCH A COUPLE OF INNINGS AND REFLECT ON WHY I DO WHAT I DO.

AND WHEN I LOOK DOWN AT THE CROWD, I'M ALWAYS REMINDED OF ONE VERY *IMPORTANT* DAY...

HEY PETEY...RISE AND SHINE, IT'S BASEBALL TIME.

I FEEL GOOD ABOUT TODAY-- I THINK THIS COULD *FINALLY* BE THE YEAR.

OH, YOU BOYS AND YOUR SPORTS!

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM, KILLER? NOT HUNGRY?

I DON'T KNOW IF I WANNA GO THIS YEAR, UNCLE BEN. IT'S KIND OF A *DRAG.*

OKAY, PAL-- I UNDERSTAND. I'LL JUST GO BY *MYSELF,* THEN...

UH...NO NEED, UNCLE BEN. I'LL BE READY IN A MINUTE, OKAY?

I ACTED LIKE A PILL THE ENTIRE WAY TO THE STADIUM, MAKING IT CLEAR THAT I'D RATHER BE ANYWHERE BUT THERE. I WAS GETTING OLDER, BUT SO WAS HE. YOU COULD TELL WE WERE DRIFTING *APART*...

HEY, BUDDY, SEE THE *BLIMP*? *THAT'S* A FIRST! AND I HEAR THEY PAINTED THE TOPS OF THE DUGOUTS!

I TOLD YOU TODAY WAS GOING TO BE DIFFERENT. DIDN'T I *SAY* SO?

SHEA STADIU

THERE YA GO...OUR USUAL SEATS, M'LUD! I LIKE THE LOOK OF OUR LINEUP THIS YEAR. I THINK WE CAN DO SOME DAMAGE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ORDER--

WHATEVER. THEY'LL STILL LOSE.

WELL, IT DOESN'T MATTER IF THEY DO--IT'S *GOOD* TO LOSE ONCE IN A WHILE. IT MAKES WINNING ALL THE--

UNCLE BEN, HOW ABOUT WE SKIP THE SPEECH THIS YEAR, OKAY?

AS YOU *LIKE*, PETER.

AND SO I SAT THERE FEELING BAD, AND HE SAT THERE TO THE LEFT OF ME IN SILENCE. AND TOGETHER THE TWO OF US WATCHED THE METS GET BLOWN OUT, TWO FEET AWAY AND FIVE MILES APART.

BUT YOU KNOW, A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO YET ANOTHER DEVILISH DEFEAT...

...THE METS ACTUALLY STARTED TO *WIN.*

I DON'T BELIEVE IT! I DON'T BELIEVE IT! *WE WON!*

UNCLE BEN, DID YOU SEE--?

BUT HE DIDN'T HAVE TO SAY A WORD. THE WHOLE MESSAGE OF THE MOMENT WAS WRITTEN ON HIS FACE.

YEAH...I GET IT. LIFE'S A VERY LONG SEASON. SOME YOU WIN...

AND JUST FOR TODAY, WE WERE WINNERS--ME AND MY UNCLE BEN, SHARING A MOMENT IN THE SEATS OF SHEA STADIUM.

THE METS HAD FINALLY *WON.* SUDDENLY, LIFE MADE COMPLETE SENSE TO ME.

THREE DAYS LATER, HE WAS *DEAD.*

GOD, I *MISS* THAT OLD MAN.

THAT'S WHY I COME HERE EVERY YEAR-- NOT TO WATCH THE GAME, BUT TO CONNECT TO THE GOOFY OLD GUY WHO BROUGHT ME HERE FOR THE FIRST TIME. IT'S HOW I CONNECT WITH *MYSELF.*

WHAT, YOU COULDN'T HAVE MANAGED A *RAINOUT* OR SOMETHING, YOU OLD CODGER?

I SUDDENLY REALIZE THAT I'M ALONE IN THE STANDS AND IT'S GETTING *COLD.* THE METS HAVE LOST BY TWELVE BILLION RUNS. NOT THAT THE SCORE MAKES ANY DIFFERENCE.

I MEAN, AT LEAST OUR CATCHER MADE THE ALL-STAR TEAM THIS YEAR. AND BESIDES IT'S A *LONG* SEASON.

AH, WELL...TIME TO PUT THE OLD GLOVE AWAY FOR ANOTHER YEAR, I GUESS. AS I TRUDGE TOWARDS THE EMPTY EXIT ROWS, SOMETHING MAKES ME STOP FOR A MOMENT AND LOOK BACK.

MAYBE IT'S JUST THE SOUND OF THE WIND BLOWING THE TRASH AROUND. MAYBE IT'S NOTHING... BUT I COULD SWEAR IT SOUNDS LIKE AN OLD MAN'S VOICE, WHISPERING ACROSS THE YEARS:

STAN LEE presents:

Maybe Next Year

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TRANSPARENCY DIGITAL colorist
RS & COMICRAFT's Jason letterer
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